



Courbet's Realism

Michael Fried

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"'This book,' Michael Fried's work opens, 'was written not so much chapter by chapter as painting by painting over a span of roughly ten years.' *Courbet's Realism* is a magnificent work and its very first sentence brings us up against the qualities of mind of its author, qualities that make it as impressive as it is. It allows us to reconstruct the keen eye, the commitment to perception, the gift of rapt concentration, the conviction that great paintings are not necessarily understood easily, and the further conviction that a great painter deserves to get from us as good as he gives. By drawing on these qualities, Fried achieves something out of reach for all but a handful of his colleagues. In his writing, art history takes on some of the character of art itself. It is driven by the same stubborn resolve to open our eyes."—Richard Wollheim, *San Francisco Review of Books*

Courbet's Realism is clearly a major contribution to the highly active field of Courbet studies. . . . But to contribute here and now is necessarily also to contribute to central debates about art history itself, and so the book is also—I hesitate to say 'more importantly,' because of the way object and method are woven together in it—a major contribution to current attempts to rethink the foundations and objects of art history. . . . It will not be an easy book to come to terms with; for all its engagement with contemporary literary theory and related developments, it is not an application of anything, and its deeply thought-through arguments will not fall easily in line with the emerging shapes of the various 'new art histories' that tap many of the same theoretical resources. At this moment, there may be nothing more valuable than such a work."—Stephen Melville, *Art History*

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